

Judges 17-18 - Thursday, February 21st, 2013

- Beginning in chapter seventeen, we round a corner of sorts, in that the remainder of the book through chapter twenty-one is very different.
- This, for a couple of reasons, the first of which is that there are no more Judges that are mentioned throughout the remainder of this book.
- Secondly, while the first sixteen chapters were riddled with Israel's sin, the last five chapters are more disturbing concerning Israel's sin.

- The remainder of this book records two events in Israel's history during the period of the Judges to show us how low they had sunk into sin.
- The question becomes, why did God deem it necessary to have the remainder of this book record just how low Israel had sunk into sin?
- I believe the answer is that God wants us to know where the cycle of sin leads and how it is that He is always faithful to raise up a deliverer.

- What we're about to see in this first event is that any attempt at being religious apart from the Word of God is an absolute exercise in futility.
- We'll also see where it leads and how it ends. To say a life lived apart from God's Word ends in disaster would be a gross understatement.
- If you're one who reads ahead to stay ahead you know exactly what I'm talking about. It's so graphic you wouldn't think it was God's Word.

(1) Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name *was* Micah. (2) And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears—here *is* the silver with me; I took it." And his mother said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my son!"

- Here we start off with the account of a man by the name of Micah, whose name means, "who is like unto the Lord," stealing from his mom.
- Eleven hundred shekels is by any standard a very large sum of money, which would indicate that she was an extremely wealthy woman.
- The reason we know this is because of what we'll read when we get to verse ten where it says that ten shekels was about a year's wage.

- Also, notice how she puts a curse on the money that's stolen, and the one who stole it, so much so, that Micah knew he and it were cursed.
- The reason I point this out is, it's a lesson we can learn from the whole incident namely, being religious tends to make one superstitious.
- This is evidenced by the reason that he returns the money. In other words, he doesn't fess up because it's wrong rather he fears the curse.

- Mom is no better such that she reverses the curse by blessing him for returning the money with no regard for her son who took the money.
- This tells me that money was her god, which is another lesson we can learn from the text. Being religious doesn't mean you serve God.
- One can be outwardly religious, yet inwardly serve and even worship mammon as their god, this because they cannot serve two masters.

Charles Spurgeon - "Very little was her blessing worth, since she had been so ready at cursing. Her silver was her god while it was in the form of shekels, quite as much as when it was fashioned into an image, or else she had not cursed because of the loss of it. Her son Micah, who became so ostentatiously religious, was a thief to begin with. A superstitious dread made him return what his conscience did not forbid him to steal! The man was made of the right material to become a ritualist."

(3) So when he had returned the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the LORD for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you." (4) Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.

- We have a huge problem here with this entire scene. The problem is that what they are doing is idolatry, which is totally forbidden by God.
- It's interesting to note how that she cloaks this under the banner of having it dedicated to the Lord, which again implies that she's religious.
- In other words, it's OK to disobey the commands of the Lord, because outwardly we have dedicated that which we are doing, to the Lord.

- By the way, this may explain, though obviously not excuse, why famous people often appear outwardly religious when receiving an award.
- They'll say something like, "I want to thank God for this award," or, "God bless you," all the while receiving the award for blaspheming God.
- By that I mean, the words in their songs are overtly disobedient to the commands of God, and as such, they are exactly like Micah's mom.

- I can't get over the fact that this is all taking place in the arena of parenting. In effect, she as the parent is permitting and promoting all this.
- I would be disingenuous were I not to confess how convicted I am by this. Let me explain, as a parent I'm prone to do the same exact thing.
- As a father, I can both permit and promote idolatry in my home while at the same time dismissing it as having been dedicated to the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon - "Children imitate their parents. The mother made one image, the son has a house-full of gods, and the grandson becomes a priest. If we once leave the spiritual worship of God, there is no telling how far one should wander."

(5) The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.
- This verse teaches us where idolatry can lead. Here, Micah turns his house into a shrine and in so doing arbitrarily makes his son a priest.
- This is wrong on every level. Not only were they to worship at Shilo, they couldn't make anyone a priest, they had to be from Levi's tribe.
- Herein lies the lesson that we can learn from this verse, outward religion absent inward relationship leads us to do whatever we feel is right.

(6) In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.

- Verse five happens because of what verse six tells us. More specifically, this leads to people doing whatever is right in their own eyes.
- There is absolutely no regard for that which is pleasing in the eyes of God, and as such we have here a picture of total spiritual anarchy.
- Everyone does what's pleasing in their own eyes, such that they create a convenient user-friendly religion with a God made in their image.

Proverbs 14:12 NKJV There is a way *that seems* right to a man, But its end *is* the way of death.

(7) Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he *was* a Levite, and was staying there. (8) The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find *a place*. Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed.

- There's something here I need to point out, and it's not so easily visible at first glance. Notice this is a Levite that's wandering aimlessly.
- The reason I point this out is that Levite's are supposed to be serving in their priestly role in the tabernacle and then later in the temple.
- This begs the question of why a Levite would be wandering around and looking for a place to stay no less when he should be in the temple.

- The answer to the question just so happens to be the lesson in the text. Nobody is worshipping in the temple, their doing their own thing.
- So much so, that the Levites are sort of "out-of-business" if you will, and as such they are forced to abandon the priestly calling on their life.
- Here's what I'm thinking, the negative impact the disobedience of the Micah's of this world have on the church, can never be understated.

(9) And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?" So he said to him, "I *am* a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find *a place* to stay." (10) Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *shekels* of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in.

- Conspicuously absent from the narrative is any mention of Micah determining whether or not this Levite was even a descendant of Aaron.
- This shouldn't come as any surprise given that he's doing whatever he feels is right in his own eyes and it's with no regard to God's Word.
- Sadly, this scenario plays out in a myriad of ways in the church today with leaders being appointed solely on the basis of what feels right.

(11) Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. (12) So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. (13) Then Micah said, "Now I know that the LORD will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is that it once again speaks to how Micah is given over to his superstition.
- By that I mean, he is assuming that the Lord will be good to him and show favor to him by virtue of how good he is to this traveling Levite.
- The problem with this assumption is, it's based solely on what he thinks is right, and it's not based on what God's Word says is right.

Charles Spurgeon - "So superstition always talks. This was an ordained man and one of the regular clergy therefore a blessing must attend his performances. Though the image and ephods were all forbidden, and the whole worship at direct opposition to the Lord's true worship at Jerusalem, yet they looked for a blessing because the priest was in the succession: even as in these days, those who set up crosses, and pictures, and altars – and so insult the Lord Jesus, nevertheless expect peculiar favors because of some imaginary apostolic succession. 'God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' Outward formalities and performances not commanded in Scripture, we ought not to sanction by our presence, but avoid them lest we partake in the sins of them."

Judges 18:1 In those days *there was* no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day *their* inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. (2) So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.

- Chapter eighteen begins with the Danites seeking out land as an inheritance, however, the question becomes why are they doing this.
- The answer is, because they did not do all that God commanded them to do in driving out the inhabitants of the land that was given them.
- So once again we see the consequences of disobeying God and doing whatever seems right in ones own eyes, as this will prove perilous.

(3) While they *were* at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this *place*? What do you have here?" (4) He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest." (5) So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous." (6) And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the LORD *be* with you on your way."

- This passage would seem to indicate that the Danites may have not only known this Levite, but were surprised by where this Levite was.
- Again, there's no questioning on their part either as to whether or not he's actually a descendant of Aaron as evidenced by what they say.
- They just assume he's a priest, and ask him about whether or not the presence of the Lord is with them or not, to which he responds, yes.

Charles Spurgeon - "Little did they care whether he was a true servant of God or not. They were like many in our day, who think one religion as good as another. They saw before them a god, an ephod, and a priest, and that was enough for them. One would think that if they cared for religion at all, they would have been anxious to have the right one; but no, the very men who are careful in their eating, their clothing, their medicine, will take their faith second-hand from others, without examination."

- Couple of thoughts here, before we move on to verse seven the first of which is that he is a full on hireling in that he's doing this for his pay.
- He doesn't care about Micah, and he certainly doesn't care about the Danites because all he cares about is his pay and room and board.
- The fact of the matter is that everyone from Micah to the priest to the Danites is sinning against God in their willful disobedience to God.

(7) So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who *were* there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. *There were* no rulers in the land who might put *them* to shame for anything. They *were* far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone. (8) Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What *is* your *report*?" (9) So they said, "Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it *is* very good. *Would* you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go, *and* enter to possess the land. (10) When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into your hands, a place where *there is* no lack of anything that *is* on the earth."

- This is going from bad to worse for everyone involved, and especially for these Sidonians who were simply minding their own business.
- It's for this reason the spies come back with this report basically saying that they are vulnerable and the land is better than what we have.
- It's what they say in verse ten that gets me, they tell their brethren with a degree of certainty, that God has given this land into their hands.

(11) And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. (12) Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan to this day. There *it is*, west of Kirjath Jearim.) (13) And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah. (14) Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." (15) So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man—to the house of Micah—and greeted him. (16) The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. (17) Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men *who were* armed with weapons of war. (18) When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" (19) And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. *Is it* better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" (20) So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people. (21) Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them.

- Here in these verses we have the first mention in the Bible of a home invasion, and it just so happens to be the home of our friend Micah.
- What's interesting is that Micah's hireling priest doesn't really seem to care too much for him as evidenced by how he takes a better offer.
- Lest we feel too sorry for Micah, we would do well to remember that this is how it ends for those given over to disobedience and idolatry.

(22) When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who *were* in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. (23) And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?" (24) So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?'"

- You'll forgive my finding something so humorous in what is actually quite serious, but what kind of god is it if it's a god that can be stolen?
- By the way, woven into the fabric of this account is what I like to call the "why" behind the "what" of commands written in the Word of God.
- In other words, the reason why we're not to have any other gods before Him, or make images of other gods, is because they're not gods.

Charles Spurgeon – "What a mass of superstition and absurdity! Ye have stolen my gods, which are my all. They are my own gods, for I made them myself, and very precious are they to my heart, so that nothing can console me for their loss. He was foolish to trust in gods, which could not take care of themselves, yet while he did trust in them he showed his sincerity by grieving for their loss. In very deed, if we lose the smile of the living God, we may well say, 'What have I more?' To lose the presence of God is to lose all."

(25) And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" (26) Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they *were* too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house. (27) So they took *the things* Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. (28) There was no deliverer, because it *was* far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. (29) And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly *was* Laish. (30) Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. (31) So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

- So this is how it ends for those who live a life doing what seems right in their own eyes seemingly doing so with self deceived impunity.
- By that I mean they actually think they are not doing that which is displeasing in the eyes of the Lord. They think they have God's blessing.
- This should be very sobering for us who live our lives by what we think is right to do, and not by what the Word of God says is right to do.